



TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GUIDE

TAG-5-85-1

Title: Access to Public Meetings*

Purpose: This Technical Assistance Guide (TAG) provides information on steps that will enable hearing impaired, visually impaired, and mobility impaired persons to have access to public meetings. This TAG does not address the architectural accessibility of the facility in which the meeting is held. The room in which a public meeting is to be held must be accessible and the facility in which the meeting is located must be accessible to the extent necessary to permit access to the meeting room. Public meetings are those meetings to which public access is not restricted except by the topic of the meeting or the size of the facility.

Notice of Public Meetings and Request for Special Services:

Notifying the public about meetings through the newspaper or any other single general medium may not be effective in providing notice to persons with sensory impairments. Therefore agencies should undertake, when giving public notice, to insure that the notification will reach handicapped persons who may be interested in attending the meeting. Agencies planning to conduct public meetings should include in all announcements about the meeting a notice indicating that services of the kind discussed below for disabled persons will be made available. The notice should include the name, address, telephone and TDD number of a person to contact about these services. The announcement should request that handicapped persons inform the meeting sponsor of their need for special services far enough in advance of the meeting to enable the sponsor to secure these services. The amount of advance notice required and feasible may depend on the nature of the meeting and how much notice the sponsor provides the public.

Access for Hearing-Impaired Persons:

- A. Interpreters should be provided for hearing-impaired attendees. Interpreters who can send and receive sign language fluently and who are skilled at oral interpretation should be provided. It is the responsibility of the institution or agency convening the public meeting to provide and pay for interpreter services. It is not the responsibility of the convening agency to pay for interpreters that the attendee brings to the meeting.

There should be at least two signers available for each meeting likely to exceed 15 minutes where hearing-impaired persons will be present. A minimum of two signers is needed so that one can relieve the other, thus enabling them to maintain their effectiveness.

Meeting rooms should be well lighted so that the interpreter can be easily seen by hearing-impaired persons. Hearing-impaired attendees should be able to see the speaker and the signer at the same time. If the room in which the meeting is being held is large, seats for hearing-impaired persons should be reserved close to the interpreter.

Speakers should be instructed to speak clearly and at a moderate pace to facilitate sign translation. Speakers should also be instructed to clearly identify themselves, either by raising their hands or standing, in order that the interpreter and hearing impaired person can easily identify who is speaking.

If audio-visual presentations are made during the meeting, the material should be either signed or captioned. If the presentation is signed, special steps should be taken to ensure that the presentation and the signer are visible to the hearing-impaired person at the same time and that the lighting is adequate.

Needs for Visually Impaired Persons:

Meeting rooms should be well lighted.

If printed material related to the proceedings is distributed prior to the meeting, the material should be made available on tone or speech indexed audio tape on request.

If printed material needs to be read during the meeting in order for attendees to participate effectively in the meeting, then readers for the blind and visually impaired should be provided.

If there will be blind or visually impaired participants or attendees at the meeting, the sponsor should consider the use of large print and Braille agendas.

If a transcript of the meeting is made available to the general public, it should be made available to blind and visually impaired persons. For example, if a transcript is produced and made available for public inspection, a tape of the proceedings should be made available or readers should be made available on request to assist blind and visually impaired persons in using the document. If meeting transcripts are distributed to the public, tone or speech indexed audio tape copy of the

Access for Mobility Impaired Persons:

The aisles of the meeting room should be inspected prior to the meeting to ensure easy passage by persons using wheelchairs. If the design of the meeting room makes it difficult for mobility impaired persons to gain full access to the room the meeting sponsor should be prepared, on request, to provide assistance to mobility impaired persons. For example, if the aisle gradient is too steep to be negotiated independently by some persons in wheelchairs, individuals should be available to push such persons up the aisle.

Open, level areas that are not situated along emergency egress routes should be available for persons in wheelchairs. If the meeting is conducted in a sizable assembly area, guidance can be found in the Uniform Federal Accessibility Standards (UFAS) as to how many seats usable by persons in wheelchairs should be set aside. See § 4.1.2(18), 49 Fed. Reg. 31541 (Aug. 7, 1984).

The entry doors to the hearing room should have clear opening widths of at least 32".

Resources:

A list of resources has been compiled for the agencies' convenience and can be obtained by contacting:

The Coordination and Review Section
Civil Rights Division
U.S. Department of Justice
320 First Street, N.W.
Room 854-A
Washington, D.C. 20534
(202) 724-2222 Voice
(202) 724-7678 TDD



TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE GUIDE

AG-5-85-2

- Title: Assistive Listening Devices (ALDs)
- Purpose: This Technical Assistance Guide (TAG) provides information on special devices that can be used to improve communication with hearing-impaired persons. It discusses the problems ALD systems are intended to solve or ameliorate and the types, cost, advantages and disadvantages of different ALDs.
- Background: There are approximately 13 million hearing impaired persons in the United States. A significant number of these individuals can benefit from the use of an ALD.

An ALD is a device that picks up sound (voice, music, etc.) at or close to its source, that amplifies sound, and delivers it to the user's ear. An ALD has advantages over conventional amplification systems. Because the signal that is listened to is the only sound picked up by the system and transmitted to the user's ear, the hearing-impaired person's perception of that sound is significantly improved. ALDs can improve interpersonal communication in meetings and other forms of public assembly.

Types of Assistive Listening Devices

A. Audio Loop System

• Description

In an audio loop system, a loop of wire placed around a seating area receives sound transmitted by microphone and transmits the sound to those people seated in the area surrounded by the loop who are wearing hearing aids equipped with a telecoil or battery-powered portable loop receivers. This loop system works because an electrical current flowing through the loop creates a magnetic field that induces another current in the receiving mechanism. The receiver is equipped with an amplifier so that the sound level can be controlled by the hearing-impaired person.

• Major Advantages

No special receivers are needed by people whose hearing aids are equipped with telecoils. Prepackaged systems can be quickly and easily installed in

- Major Disadvantages:

The system is vulnerable to electrical interference. Systems for large areas are complex to install and a high powered amplifier is required. Also, its use requires hearing-impaired people to be concentrated in one area. Large space systems are complex to install and require skilled professional installation. If the cables are not concealed or covered adequately there is a danger of people tripping en route to or from their seats. Lastly, the labor to install a concealed or aesthetically acceptable large area loop system can be very time-consuming and expensive.

- Costs:

Costs range from \$350 for small area coverage up to \$2,500 for a large loop and a powerful amplifier. Portable receivers cost about \$75 each.

B. Infrared Systems

- Description

Infrared light is now being used for the transmission of speech and music. The carrier is invisible, and the harmless light is transmitted in the infrared range of the spectrum. The infrared light is modulated through one of several auxiliary carriers that, in turn, are modulated with the audio signal information. The transmitter is plugged into the existing public address system. Infrared light is emitted by special light emitting diodes (LED's). The number of LED's depend on the room in which the wireless sound system is installed. The power supply for the transmitting part of the sound system is usually taken from the main power supply. For the receiving end, portable, battery-operated units are employed. These use a semiconductor photocell and an FM radio-like circuit for recapturing the audio signal. After proper amplification, this signal drives an earphone or related device. The listener wears a receiver for the infrared light so the auditory signal is brought from the talker to the listener with high fidelity, without loss of signal level or the addition of background noise reverberation.

- Major Advantages

The system is not subject to electrical interference and users do not need a hearing aid equipped with a telecoil. This system has a good sound quality and is easy to operate. No concentration of disabled people is required-no special seating area.

- Major Disadvantages

Large amounts of incandescent light or sunlight in a room produce interference, and receivers must maintain a line of sight with the transmitter. Large area systems are relatively expensive.

- Cost

The infrared emitter ranges in cost from \$150-\$1,800. Receivers cost about \$120 each. Wall mounts/accessories are additional, and additional emitters are required as room size increases.

C. AM Systems

- Description

Users listen through an earpiece or headset plugged into a special AM receiver. The sound in the normal PA system is broadcast through the room by an AM transmitter.

- Major Advantages

The system is easy to install and users have the freedom to choose where they want to sit. AM equipment is less expensive than the FM and infrared systems.

- Major Disadvantages

AM systems are vulnerable to the same interference sources that affect AM radio broadcast reception, and AM systems do not perform well in buildings with substantial amounts of structural steel.

- Costs:

Transmitters cost from \$350-\$1,600 and receivers cost from \$10 to \$35.

D. FM Systems

- Description

The signal is transmitted by an FM transmitter plugged into the PA system to a portable receiver. Receivers resemble a small pocket radio connected by cord to an earplug or headphones. A neckloop can be used by persons with a

- Major Advantages

This system produces an excellent quality sound and users have the freedom to choose their own seating location. The system is not subject to electrical interference and is simple and inexpensive to install.

- Major Disadvantages

The system is more expensive than the AM system or audio loop system.

- Costs:

Transmitters range in cost from \$500-\$2,000 and receivers range in cost from \$15-\$350 each.

E. Hard Wired Systems

- Description

Each listener location is wired directly to the source of amplified sound. This requires that a number of jacks, with volume controls, be installed at pre-determined locations into which the user can plug an earphone or headphone.

- Major Advantages

In newly-constructed facilities this system is easily installed and is not subject to electrical interference.

- Major Advantages

In newly-constructed facilities this system is easily installed and is not subject to electrical interference.

- Major Disadvantages

Hearing-impaired people must sit in pre-determined locations to use the system. Installation in an existing facility can be expensive and installation of additional locations may require re-engineering the system to maintain the proper impedance match.

- Costs:

The cost of these systems varies greatly. Cost can be considerably reduced if the system is installed when the respective facility is constructed.

Resources:

A list of resources has been compiled for the agencies' convenience and can be obtained by contacting:

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Civil Rights Division
U.S. Department of Justice
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